



THE HISTORY OF THE

DETROIT TIGERS

WAYNE STEWART



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Stewart, Wayne, 1951-
The history of the Detroit
Tigers

DISCARD

HARRY HEILMANN

HOOKS DAUSS

TRAVIS FRYMAN

KIRK GIBSON

AL KALINE

ALAN TRAMMELL

BOBBY HIGGINSON

TY COBB

TONY CLARK

HANK GREENBERG

CECIL FIELDER

MICKEY COCHRANE





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DETROIT
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Summary: A team history of the Detroit Tigers, who gave us Ty Cobb, Al Kaline, and nearly a century of memories.

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DETROIT,

MICHIGAN, WAS BORN IN 1701 WHEN A MAN NAMED

Antoine Cadillac established a fort on a plot of land connecting Lake Huron and Lake Erie. The city developed quickly, thanks in large part to the booming fur trade. By the early 1900s, fur trading had given way to automobile manufacturing as the city's primary industry.

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But even before Detroit became known as the "Motor City," it was known for its professional baseball. In 1881, a National League (NL) franchise called the Wolverines made its home there. When the American League (AL) was formed in 1901, Detroit's club made the jump over to that league. The team, which sported black and yellow striped stockings in its early years, was dubbed "the Tigers" by

SAM CRAWFORD

a local newspaper in 1895, and the Detroit Tigers have been on the prowl ever since.

In its very first
AL game,
Detroit scored
10 runs in the
ninth inning
to beat
Milwaukee,
14–13.

{EARLY GROWLINGS} Detroit first tasted success in 1887, winning the NL title. In the postseason, the club played the St. Louis Browns, the champions of another league called the American Association. Detroit emerged victorious over St. Louis in a playoff

• series to reign as baseball's top team.

More than a decade later, Detroit's first true star emerged: outfielder Ty Cobb. Cobb patrolled the outfield for Detroit from 1905 through 1926. The "Georgia Peach," as he was nicknamed, put together a career .367 batting average—the best ever in baseball—and was a brilliant base burglar. Although his boastful and aggressive personality didn't win him a lot of friends on the field, no one could deny his ability. "Ty Cobb is a low-down, miserable excuse for a

TONY CLARK



Called a
"genius in
spikes" by
some, Ty Cobb
led the AL in
batting in
12 seasons.

TY COBB



human being,” said Tigers outfielder Sam Crawford. “He’s also the greatest player I’ve ever seen.”

Cobb batted over .300 in 23 seasons and topped the hallowed .400 mark three times. The fiery outfielder snared more votes than any other player, including Babe Ruth, when baseball’s Hall of Fame selected its first class of honorees. “Ruth could knock

Pitcher Bill Donovan struck out 187 batters in **1903**, a club record that stood for 41 years.

your brains out,” explained Boston Red Sox outfielder Tris Speaker, himself a Hall-of-Famer, “but Cobb would drive you crazy.”

Another early Tigers star was Sam Crawford, whose specialty was hitting triples. The outfielder led the league in triples six times, and his 312 career three-baggers still rank as the most in baseball history. With Detroit manager Hughie Jennings guiding these talented players, the Tigers won three consecutive AL pennants from 1907 to 1909.

BILL DONOVAN





Unlike Cobb,
a great
line-drive hitter,
'90s star Cecil
Fielder was
a long-ball
specialist.

CECIL FIELDER

While Cobb and Crawford sparked Detroit at the plate, two pitchers led the team on the mound. George Mullin earned

Detroit's	66 victories from 1907 to 1909, while "Wild Bill"
1913 lineup	Donovan won 51 games during those years.
showed great	Unfortunately, even these stars couldn't make the
speed on the	Tigers world champions, as they lost in the
base paths,	
lacing a	World Series all three years.
whopping	
102 triples.	

12 **{1910-1933: A GLOOMY ERA}** Most of the seasons between 1910 and 1933 were, to Tigers fans, years best to be forgotten.

Although Detroit finished a few seasons as high as second or third in the AL, they were more often mired near the bottom of the standings. Even the team's highlights during those years seemed overshadowed. For instance, on April 20, 1912, the Tigers moved into a new ballpark called Nevin Field. The next day, however, Detroit newspapers hardly mentioned the event, as the headlines

HARRY HEILMANN

announced the sinking of the *Titanic* instead.

Still, Detroit did feature some great players during that era.

Pitcher “Hooks” Dauss, who played in Detroit for 15 years, got his



nickname because of his great hooking curveball. His 221 career victories remain tops among all Detroit pitchers. Another star was outfielder Harry Heilmann, a great hitter who won four AL batting

titles with averages of .393 or higher. Heilmann hit over .400 once, but if he would have managed a mere nine total additional hits

Heinie Manush

hit .378 in

1926, edging

out Yankees

star Babe

Ruth for

the AL bat-

ting crown.

during his peak seasons, he would have owned a

record four .400 campaigns. "Next to [Hall of Fame

infielder] Rogers Hornsby, he was the best right-

handed hitter of them all," said Cobb.

Outfielder Heinie Manush starred for Detroit in

- 14** the mid-1920s, as did future Hall-of-Famer Charlie Gehringer, a sweet-hitting second baseman. Gehringer played for the Tigers for many years, leading the league in hitting (.371) in 1937 and winning the AL Most Valuable Player (MVP) award. Known for his quiet manner and graceful skill, Gehringer was nicknamed the "Mechanical Man" because he handled his job with the efficiency of a machine. "You wind him up on opening day," one teammate said of Gehringer, "and forget him."

STEVE SPARKS



{ROARING SUCCESS} The Tigers finally rose in the standings in the late 1930s. From 1934 to 1947, the Tigers consistently finished at or near the top of the league standings, winning AL pennants in



1934, 1935, 1940, and 1945. The Tigers featured a number of fine players, but none were better than slugging first baseman Hank Greenberg.

During his 12 seasons with the Tigers, Greenberg hit as many as 58 home runs (1938) and drove in as many as 183 runs (1937) in a season. His 183 RBI remain the third-highest RBI total for a single season in baseball history. “Greenberg positively made a great hitter out of himself,” said Baltimore Orioles executive Paul Richard. “He did it by constant practice. . . . He’d stay after games and hit until darkness made him quit.”

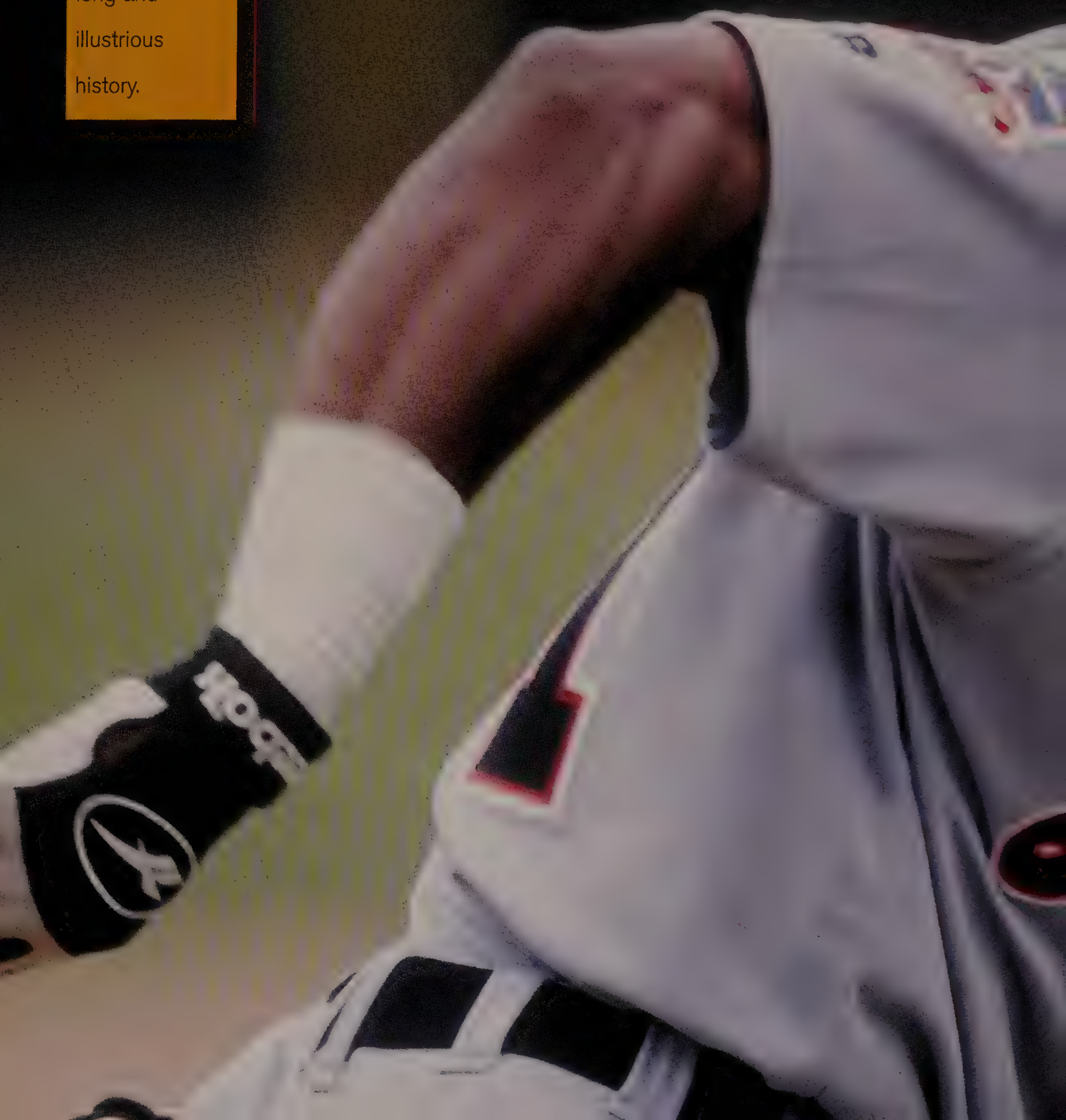
Stars Hank Greenberg (middle) and Charlie Gehringer (right) played in the **1938** All-Star Game.

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Leading the Tigers on the mound during those years was Lynwood “Schoolboy” Rowe, who won 24 games in 1934. However, the main driving force in Detroit during that era was player/manager Mickey Cochrane. A catcher by trade, Cochrane had been sold to Detroit by the Philadelphia Athletics for \$100,000—a royal sum of money in those days. But Cochrane proved his worth by winning the 1934 AL MVP award. “He was the reason we won in ’34

HANK GREENBERG

The Tigers
have played
nearly 16,000
games in their
long and
illustrious
history.





and '35," said Tigers pitcher Eldon Auker. "We were like a family.

We followed him around like kids, and we would do anything Mike

One of the
game's most
gifted all-
around play-
ers, George
Kell slapped
56 doubles
in **1950**.

wanted us to do."

Detroit lost the 1934 World Series in seven games

to the St. Louis Cardinals. But in 1935, the Tigers

bounced back from a poor start to finish atop the AL

again. Pitcher Tommy Bridges excelled as Detroit then

20 finally won its first world championship, beating the Chicago Cubs.

In 1940, the Tigers won another pennant. Although they lost that World Series, they clawed their way to another world championship in 1945. The main hero that year was pitcher Hal Newhouser, who won 25 games, posted a tiny 1.81 ERA, and won two World Series contests.

{FROM KELL TO KALINE} After winning the World Series in 1935 and 1945, the Tigers didn't win another AL pennant until 1968. Still, Detroit continued to produce great players. One such player

GEORGE KELL

was third baseman George Kell, a future Hall-of-Famer. Kell, who had previously been cut by two teams, gave the Tigers a strong bat and a sure glove in the late 1940s and early '50s.



The next Tigers star was rifle-armed outfielder Al Kaline, who joined the Tigers at the age of 18. In 1955, the 20-year-old Kaline—who would eventually win 10 Gold Glove awards and collect more

than 3,000 career hits—became the youngest player ever to win an AL batting title. “In my book, he’s the greatest right-handed hitter

Catcher Bill
Freehan was
plunked by a
pitch 24 times
in **1968**,
including
three times in
one game.

in the league,” said Boston Red Sox outfielder Ted Williams of the young Kaline. “There’s no telling how far the kid could go.”

In 1968, practically every Detroit player had a great season. Pitcher Denny McLain was phenomenal,

22 winning 31 games with a 1.96 ERA—numbers that earned him the Cy Young Award and AL MVP honors. Other standouts included Kaline, veteran first baseman Norm Cash, and outfielder Willie Horton. Horton slugged 36 homers that season, helping Detroit win the AL pennant by 12 games.

In the 1968 World Series, it was Detroit pitcher Mickey Lolich’s turn to step into the spotlight. Going into the series-deciding seventh game, Lolich had already won twice. On a mere

BILL FREEHAN



Like Willie Horton, outfielder Bobby Higginson was a key source of offensive power.

BOBBY HIGGINSON



two days' rest, he out-dueled St. Louis Cardinals ace Bob Gibson to lead Detroit to a 4–1 victory and the championship. Tigers fans celebrated so wildly that it became news. “It was Christmas, the Fourth of July, and Mardi Gras all wrapped into one,” declared the *Detroit Free News*.

A brilliant fielder, long-time star Lou Whitaker earned three Gold Glove awards in the **1980s**.

{MOTORING TO MORE TITLES} In 1972, the Tigers won the AL Eastern Division (the league was

split into two divisions in 1969) with Kaline still carrying the offensive load. In the AL Championship Series (ALCS), however, the Oakland Athletics ended Detroit's season. The Tigers then slid down the standings and stayed there for the rest of the '70s.

Despite their slump, the Tigers were still fun to watch, thanks largely to the sensational double-play duo of shortstop Alan Trammell and second baseman Lou Whitaker, who played together for a league-record 1,918 games. “Where do you find a shortstop and

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LOU WHITAKER

second baseman who can hit 20 home runs a year for you?

And steal bases? They can do everything on the field while they're

playing except manage a ballgame," praised New York Yankees



manager Lou Piniella.

The Tigers rose in the early 1980s, and by 1984, they were a force again. Star pitcher Jack Morris threw a no-hitter early that

season, then Detroit rolled to a 35–5 record, the best in baseball

history after 40 games. Under the leadership of manager

Sparky Anderson, the Tigers never lost their grip on first place, cruising to a 104–58 mark and another world championship.

Outfielder Kirk Gibson kicked off the Tigers' **1986** season by clouting two opening-day homers.

Morris was outstanding in 1984, but relief pitcher

Willie Hernandez and outfielder Kirk Gibson were

perhaps Detroit's best players. Relievers don't often win the

Cy Young Award, but in 1984, Hernandez saved 32 games and won that honor and the AL MVP award. Gibson, meanwhile, was a former college football standout whose hustle, intensity, and powerful bat were a constant inspiration to his teammates.

"He was the ultimate team player," Anderson said of Gibson.

"When he went 0-for-4 and we lost, he could bite off the head of a rattlesnake. When he went 0-for-4 and we won, he ran around the

KIRK GIBSON

clubhouse like he had hit two grand slams and stole the mustard off somebody's hot dog."

An unspec-
tacular but
steady re-
liever, Mike
Henneman led
Detroit in
saves from
1990 to 1995.

In 1987, Detroit rebounded from a sluggish start to win its division again on the final day of the season. First baseman Darrell Evans led the way at the plate, drilling 34 homers at the age of 40. Unfortunately, Detroit was bumped from the playoffs by the

28 Minnesota Twins in the ALCS.

{READY TO RUMBLE} The Tigers seemed to be declawed in the 1990s, posting losing records in eight seasons. Several outstanding players kept Tigers fans coming to the park, however. The first was slugging first baseman Cecil Fielder, who led the AL with 51 home runs in 1990, becoming the first big-league player in 13 years to reach the 50-homer plateau. The burly Fielder, who continued to power the Tigers throughout the early '90s, also

MIKE HENNEMAN

became the only Tigers hitter ever to hit a home run blast that cleared the left-field roof looming far above Tiger Stadium.

Two other Tigers stars were infielder Travis Fryman and outfielder Bobby Higginson. Fryman became a perennial All-Star with his great intelligence and instincts, while Higginson was known for his quick and powerful stroke at the plate.

In **1999**, Brad Ausmus was the league's top defensive catcher, going 60 straight games without an error.

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Higginson emerged as a star in 1996 with a .320 average and 26 home runs, but his arm was just as dangerous as his bat, gunning down many opposing base runners.

In the late 1990s, two other standouts emerged from Detroit's minor-league system: first baseman Tony Clark and pitcher Brian Moehler. At 6-foot-7 and a muscular 245 pounds, Clark reminded Tigers fans of former star Cecil Fielder. From 1996 to 1999, he averaged 31 homers per season. Moehler, meanwhile,

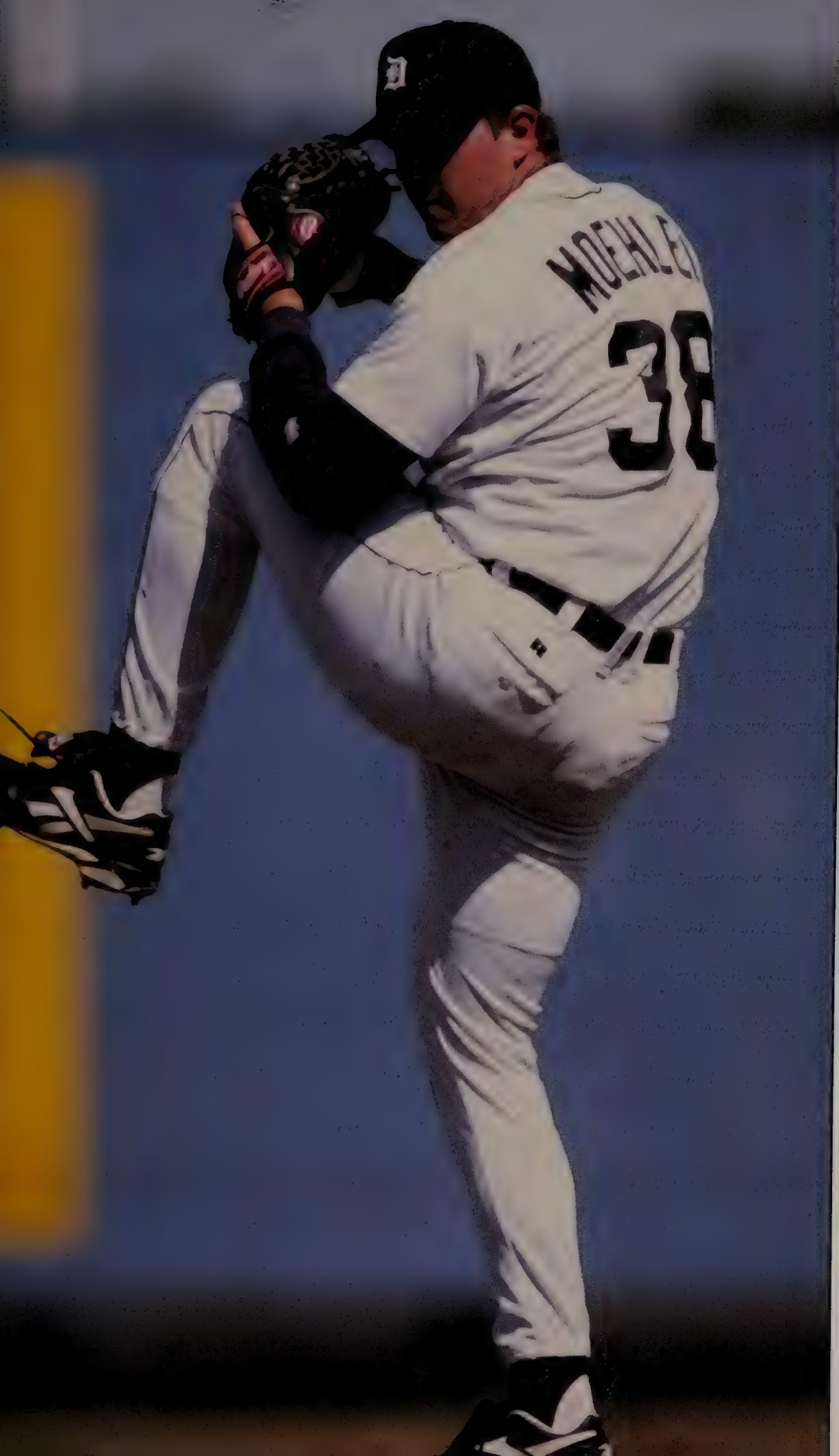
BRAD AUSMUS

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Strong-armed
second base-
man Damion
Easley
excelled at
turning the
double play.

DAMION EASLEY





One of
Detroit's
primary work-
horses, pitcher
Brian Moehler
won 12 games
in **2000**.

BRIAN MOEHLER

posted at least 10 wins in each of his first four big-league seasons.

He also had the distinction of starting the last game played at

With his
blazing fast-
ball, Matt
Anderson was
expected to
become one
of baseball's
top closers.

Tiger Stadium and the first game held in Comerica
Park, a new park to which the Tigers moved in 2000.

As a new century unfolds, the Tigers are eager
to build on their long winning tradition. That tradition
includes eight AL pennants, four world champion-

32 ships, and an array of legendary players ranging from Ty Cobb to
Kirk Gibson. Now, settled in Comerica Park, today's Tigers hope
to track down a ninth pennant and make the Motor City roar
once more.

MATT ANDERSON



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1900 The Tigers prepared to join the new American League with seven other teams



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